

# Why Studying & Teaching *Aqīdah* is Necessary for the '*Ulamā*' & Students of Knowledge

BY ḤAMZAH WALD MAQBŪL

## PROBLEM

Sunnism is suffering an identity crisis: other than not self-identifying as a Shī'ite, very few people who identify as Sunnīs can explain what beliefs makes a person a Sunnī. This has left a bleeding wound in people's conception of Islām, through which infections such as Qādiyānism, Rāfiḍism, Progressivism, Modernism, and other forms of misguidance cause many well-meaning people great damage to both their faith as well as their worldly existence.

Otherworldly concerns of protecting people from the harm of odious deviation from the pure faith, which can delay or deny salvation, tag along with the deleterious effects of the pursuits of sectarian agendas in the guise of religion which are literally burning entire nations like Syria and Yemen to the ground in front of our eyes. At the same time Muslims living in North

America and Europe are witnessing a coup against established legal, cultural and spiritual norms in the name of progressivism and liberalism, which confusingly seem to come from quarters which are, politically, less openly hostile to some version of an established Muslim presence. The chasm which is opening because of this coup threatens to divide what used to be the common Sunnī identity in these lands into a Reform/Conservative/Orthodox-type divide which currently exists in the Jewish community; the reform identity being roughly one of radically jettisoning canonical interpretive methodology and precedent.

Conservatism is acknowledging the need to do what Reform Judaism did, while preserving the traditional forms of Judaism when practical. Orthodoxy has been seemingly left behind as an attempt to carry on the premodern Jewish theology and law, uninterrupted by modernity. One should note that this divide within Judaism started from the United States, and has now pervaded the Jewish world, and likewise, if such a chasm formally opened up in the United States, it would be a matter of import for the entire *ummah*, as the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ stated, “You will follow those who went before you hand’s breadth for hand’s breadth, cubit for cubit, to the point that if they went into a lizard hole, you would also go into it.” They asked him ﷺ, “Do you mean the Jews and Christians?” He ﷺ replied, “Who else?”<sup>1</sup>

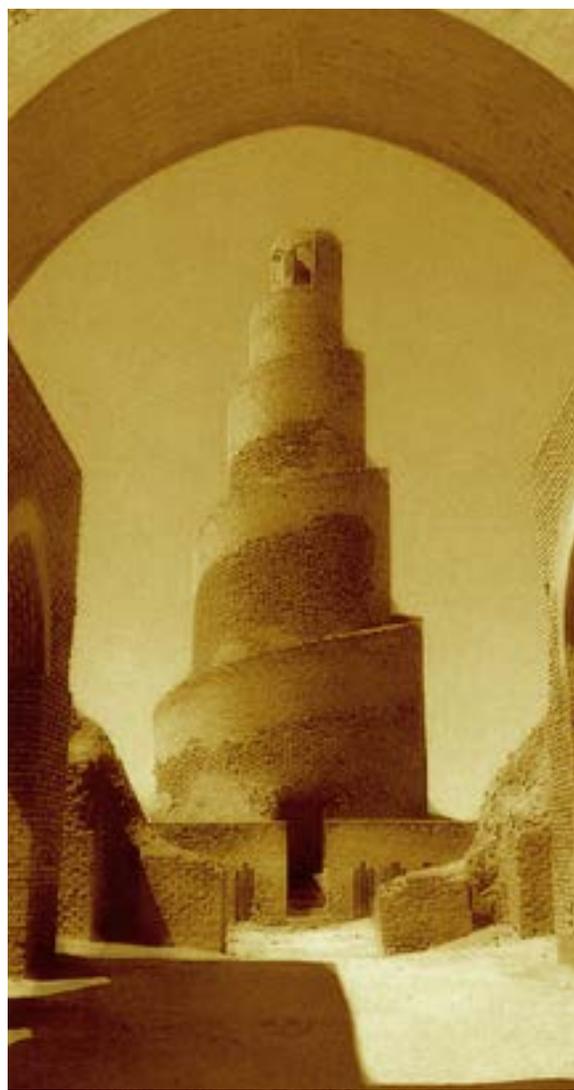
To the scholarly past of this *ummah*, the obvious place to find the necessary guidance to solve the above-mentioned problems should be in the books of *Aqīdah* of the Sunnī *Kalām* tradition; however, this seems to not be as obvious anymore to the *ummah* as it should be, and for that reason a number of problems arise.

The following tract, by Allāh’s help, is meant to investigate these problems, and to make the case that a serious revival of the study of *Aqīdah* in our communities is one of the foremost obligations upon Muslims today.

<sup>1</sup> Narrated by Bukhārī, Muslim, Aḥmad and others. The narration translated is from Bukhārī.

## HOW HAS THE STUDY OF *AQĪDAH* FALLEN FROM IMPORTANCE?

There are many reasons why the study of *Aqīdah* has fallen out of favor. Firstly, the lay public, due to sectarian influence of foreign groups, has come to see the word *Aqīdah* as a codeword for polemical infighting, something which most North American Muslims rightly intuit will lead to little or no benefit. Thus, the word *Aqīdah* now conjures up images of brothers pointing fingers upwards





and asking, “Where is Allāh?” or whether or not you believe that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ is omnipresent in all points of time and space. Such issues are irrelevant to the public.<sup>2</sup> Worse yet, they are weaponized by some and result in dissention and division within congregations.

Secondly, many *madāris* have severely downplayed if not outright jettisoned the study of *Kalām*<sup>3</sup> other than for the purpose of refuting heterodox groups. Worse yet, sectarian partisans use it to cut down

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2 Many ardent proponents of sectarianism will argue passionately that these matters are of key importance to the belief of every Muslim. This flies in the face of the fact that if these matters were so essential to a person’s *islām*, they would have been explicated very clearly in one of the undisputable scriptural sources of *dīn* and on the tongue of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ.

3 *Kalām* being the medium of the study of advanced ‘*Aqīdah* in most Sunnī *madāris*

other legitimate views within Sunnism, as if they are patent falsehood, even though the matters at hand are, at most, differences of opinion. Although refutation is a legitimate purpose of the knowledge of ‘*Aqīdah*, it is hardly the aim of its study. It is more important for a believer to know who he is, rather than who he isn’t: the former is based on the knowledge of revelation, whereas the latter is more conveniently facilitated by sectarian animus. It is important to note that revelation “*taught man what he knew not*”,<sup>4</sup> whereas even the people of falsehood are adept at circularly refuting one another.

Thirdly, much of the lay public has come to the idea that the old works of *Kalām*, even if a sentimentally important part of our intellectual heritage, lack relevance to today’s more pressing issues. Many may ask,

4 al-‘Alaq 96:5

what can Rāzī, Ghazālī, and Juwaynī practically teach me to prepare for an encounter with New Atheism or Liberalism, or any number of other prevalent ideologies at odds with the way of life prescribed by revelation?

### THE ROLE OF SCHOLARS & STUDENTS OF KNOWLEDGE

For the reasons outlined above, scholars and students of knowledge have a responsibility<sup>5</sup> to act as facilitators and intermediaries between the laity and revelation's Divine and prophetic sources. There are many benefits that the *ummah* will take from a clerical class well-grounded in Sunnī 'Aqīdah. Unfortunately, the very need for this class of specialists in the information age,<sup>6</sup> something taken for granted in past generations, requires explanation today.

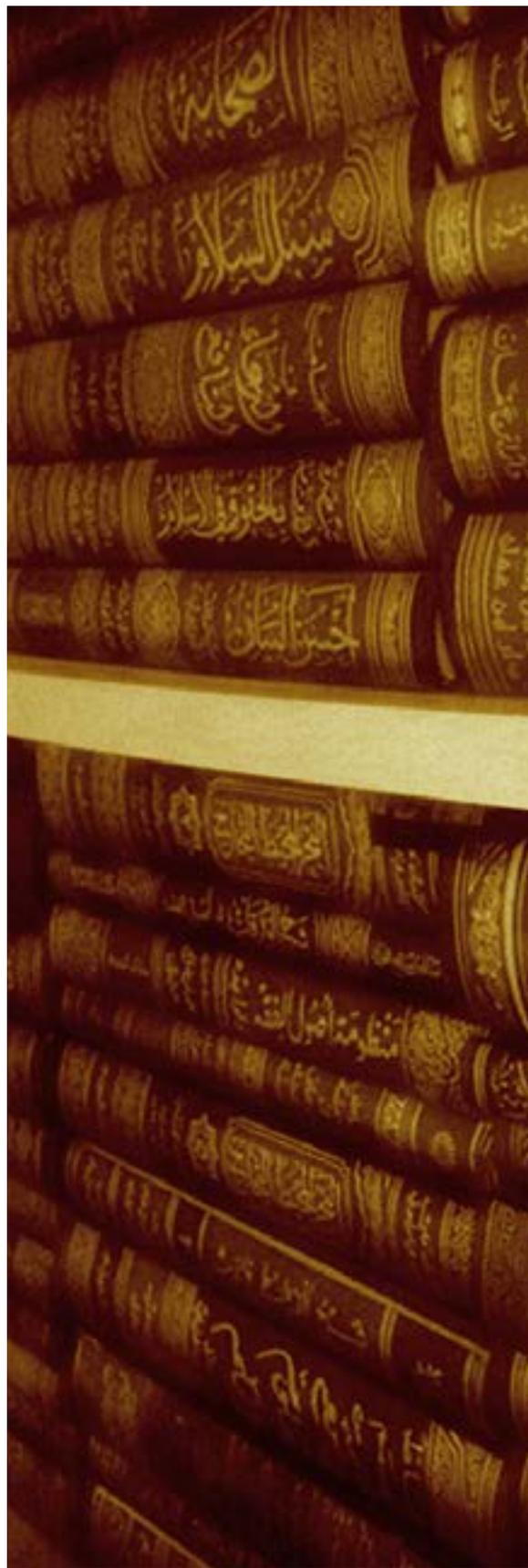
### REQUISITE QUALIFICATION

Pious and illuminated hearts and minds must disseminate the sacred creed of Islām, not use sectarianism to divide the *ummah*, build socio-political clout, or win followers and disciples,<sup>7</sup> but in order to show Muslims

5 This responsibility comes hand in hand with the responsibility of the public to heed their teachings and admonishments.

6 Ironically so-named

7 One of the unfortunate consequences of the collapse of widespread and endowed patronage of the people of knowledge is that in order to prosecute their mandates, many scholars have become part time politicians in order to fund their projects, keep masjid boards at bay, make a living or even find a platform to be heard. Although it is part of the prophetic mandate for the 'Ulamā' to maintain



who they are, rather than who they aren't. Only then will people once more start to see the Sunnī 'Aqīdah as a source of guidance and intellectual-spiritual order.

Indeed, the balance between the rational need for limits and an inclusivity which can only come from the generosity of being connected to the Divine is found in the Sunnī creed. Achieving this balance is a hallmark of being an *imām*<sup>8</sup> in this tradition. The emulation of the prophetic model is in bringing sincere believers together whenever it is possible, and separating individuals from the flock only when absolutely necessary. Thus, did Imām Ṭaḥāwī explicitly declare that anyone who meets even the most minimal standard for a valid *islām* is a *walī*<sup>9</sup> of Allāh, even if they are sinners or, in some

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a well-cultivated relationship with the public, there is an inherent tension between being a visionary representative of the *Haqq* as transmitted through revelation and recruiting the resources from laypeople who view such support not as a sacred duty, but as transactional. Unfortunately, due to this conundrum, some scholars have turned to demagoguery and the trappings of cults in order to extract optimal support from their followers, while maintaining a level of control that mitigates the transactionality of that support; the problem here is that in solving one problem, a bigger one is created: the training of zombie-like masses who can no longer critically engage Islām, rather only parrot what their leader says. Such a model is not the one left to us by the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ.

8 *Imām* here meaning an acknowledged authority in a field of learning amongst the sciences of revelation, as opposed to an *imām* in a local mosque.

9 An Arabic word for guardian and friend, it is the term most commonly used to denote sainthood amongst Muslims when used in the context of piety.



instances even misguided.<sup>10</sup> It was a strong statement, and one he meant to make.

Large scale propagation of 'Aqīdah in such a way will negate the stigma of sectarianism by showing people the point of 'Aqīdah (a framework through which to view the world) and not a degenerate form of divisive sectarianism. It will also give people the understanding that whoever drives exclusionary sectarianism within the Sunnī populace, isn't doing so as a representation of Sunnism; rather, it is a sign that something else is at play. In order to get the vastness of the *ummah* on to the same page in mind, then spirit and body, the framework of Sunnī 'Aqīdah must become the common thought currency between all Muslims, regardless of race,

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10 As long as such a misguidance doesn't rationally necessitate negating Islām outright.

*madhhab*, Sufic association, socioeconomic status, occupation, or nationality.

The benefits to the *ummah* of the wide and proper dissemination of *‘Aqīdah* by no means stops there. Much of the abandonment of the commandments of the sacred *Sharī‘ah* has to do with the lack of understanding amongst laypeople about the importance of *Fiqh* and its various sources rooted in revelation;<sup>11</sup> If they understood the importance of the law, they would be more avid to implement it, appreciating the elegance by which they are inseparable. In that sense, an overemphasis on the sacred law in comparison to both *‘Aqīdah* and *Taşawwuf* when ministering to the public may be a cause of its diminished acceptance amongst that same public, as it is tough to bring the body to do things when the mind<sup>12</sup> and heart<sup>13</sup> aren’t in it.

As important as the dissemination of the sacred creed is, however, it can only be done on the heels of a solid understanding of it. This requires a depth of study by the scholarly class that goes beyond a basic minimum belief for a valid *īmān*. Maintaining a cohort of the learned who are custodians of such understanding is an obligation on communities;

11 Herein lies a sign pointing to the prophetic methodology of teaching *faḍā’il* or what the virtues of things are. *Faḍā’il* as a branch of knowledge sometimes suffer the stigma of being less important than the rulings to which they point. However, inasmuch as they are necessary to engender the requisite respect in the hearts and minds of those who are morally obliged to follow those rulings, they may come to play a role which is much more important than many first think. Abandoning their mention is a departure from prophetic pedagogical methodology.

12 The mind being the spiritual seat of cognition, and the locus of correct *‘Aqīdah*.

13 The heart being a spiritual organ from where intentions originate, the rectification of which is the subject of *Taşawwuf*.



indeed, many a non-*farḍ* matter on individuals becomes a *farḍ kifāyah* on communities and sovereign states.<sup>14</sup> This is the case for all of the disciplines necessary in order for the *Dīn* of Allāh to be understood, implemented, and defended at individual and collective levels.

### METHODOLOGY IS CRITICAL

This brings us to another matter which is one of great concern to anyone who has dedicated their life to knowledge, beyond the pursuit of degrees, *ijāzāt*, clerical career opportunities and fame as preachers and leaders; that is the *uṣūlī* nature of the sacred *Sharī'ah*. *Uṣūl* are the universal principles which make up for framework within which

14 For instance having memorized the entirety of the Qur'ān isn't an integral component of faith in any individual, but it is a *farḍ kifāyah* on communities to maintain and produce those who carry and transmit the divine text.

the individual rulings of the sacred *Sharī'ah* fit. The *uṣūlī* nature of the sacred *Sharī'ah*, and its understanding was always the crown pursuit of the greatest of the scholars. In fact, to call a scholar an *uṣūlī* is to bear witness to the integrated seamlessness and encyclopedic knowledge of the *sharī'ah*, bringing names like Ghazālī and Shāh Waliyyullāh to mind. The idea is that the *Dīn* of Allāh isn't just a scattered distribution of rules, verses, statements and prohibitions to be read atomistically;<sup>15</sup> rather, those discrete data points fit into *uṣūlī* models and theoretical frameworks that undergird the different branches of learning in Islām. Thus, *Ḥadīth* is governed by *uṣūl al-Ḥadīth*, *Fiqh* is governed by *uṣūl al-Fiqh*<sup>16</sup>,

15 As made up of an aggregate of small units which are analyzed and interpreted in isolation of others.

16 The differences in *uṣūl* amongst the *madhāhib* being the reason we have different *madhabs*.



*Tafsīr* is governed by *uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, and so on. The reason is that without a methodology a person can hardly take an objective stance on any matter, much less understand large fields of information in a cohesive and cogent manner. All of these *uṣūlī* systems in turn are undergirded by *ʿAqīdah*, which is the *Uṣūl* of *Uṣūl*; it is perhaps for this reason that Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, may Allāh have mercy on him, named his work on *ʿAqīdah* with such a gravity, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*.<sup>17</sup>

Jettisoning a holistic *Uṣūlī* approach to the *Dīn* by fixating on individual verses, *aḥādīth*, and legal rulings has allowed the jackals and hyenas who prey on this *ummah* to masquerade as representatives of the Islām and flagbearers of the Sunnī tradition,<sup>18</sup>

17 Literally, the Greatest *Fiqh*

18 There are a number of popular figures who have raised great amounts of money and garnered large followings from demographically Sunnī populations, despite their utter disdain for the actual Sunnī creed in private. This is because their heterodoxy, if clearly labeled as such, would not find much support at all. Interestingly, a hallmark of Sunnism

whether they be in the form of modernists, terrorist groups, neo-Salafists,<sup>19</sup> neo-traditionalists, neo-Kharījites, or the like. When *uṣūl* are cast aside, such groups can now regurgitate particular data points from the Islāmīc tradition with enough charisma to woo audiences to their respective agendas.

Modern day reductionists have peddled the idea that *uṣūl* are an unneeded vestige of medieval foolery, and must today be replaced by the empiricism of hard evidence in the form of literal text. While other scholarly endeavors like *taḥqīq* and *takhrīj* are worthy, they are not substitutes for *uṣūl*. Powered by the false confidence a literalist worldview engenders, unscrupulous operators resort to forcing the mismatched puzzle pieces together in new,

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has always been *isnād* or an open declaration of one’s sources of knowledge, giving us the benefit of transparency as opposed to deception.

19 Neo-salafists being those who claim that they can bypass tradition in order to hearken back to the pristine Islām of the early generations. This is opposed to Sunnism which always held tradition as a great ark in which to preserve that same tradition and dispense it to the generations.





scary and, incoherent ways. Indeed, many committed Muslims, upon encountering textual evidences produced by reductionists, find themselves at a loss to explain what is specifically wrong with such groups' picture of Islām. From that pool, many subsequently join or at least tacitly support such groups, much to the spiritual, economic, political and social detriment of the *ummah*. Why would anyone bother to rearrange the *sharī'ah* in such a way? In order to deceptively harnesses

the demographic, economic power of the love and zeal of the masses for Islām. If the Bolsheviks could do it, anyone can; indeed, their spiritual heirs,<sup>20</sup> may Allāh protect us from them, continue do so.

*Uṣūlī* thinking imparts a methodology by which one can understand the *Dīn* at a deeper level. It also gives its practitioner the ability to consume and solve new problems and digest issues which arise from unprecedented circumstances. I would go one step further and say for the robust intellect, nothing in creation would be “new”<sup>21</sup> anymore. Indeed, I can affirm that at least in my own experience many “new” challenges to Islām's worldview are, in essence, rehashings of old challenges (albeit with different modalities). More often than not, historic iterations were far more sophisticated than contemporary ones. Due to the modernism's reductionist

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20 All those who use the *Dīn* to air unjustified economic grievances, and all those who believe in their hearts that some kind of redistribution of wealth will solve the problems that only a rectified heart can solve.

21 One of the hallmarks of modernist thinking is that the “newness” of a thing is directly connected to some sort of value it possesses. From a physical science point of view, we know that since the dawn of creation, there is nothing physically new, as matter and energy are neither created, nor destroyed. If that is the case for physical things, then what about the abstract and intangible universe of ideas? Furthermore, in the realm of ideas, something which was true yesterday is true today, and vice-versa, what relevance should “newness” have to ideas for an *uṣūlī* thinker in the abstract realm? In the dissemination of ideas, which is more of a political matter, these things are important, but in the world in which intellectuals transact, they rapidly lose currency amongst serious thinkers.

approach, philosophers have become largely irrelevant in the popular arena: the new standard bearers of materialism are often scientists, hard<sup>22</sup> or soft,<sup>23</sup> whose touting of materialism (and the atheism which inevitably emerges from it), is sophomoric at best.

The idea that *uṣūl*, or understanding how to think, is distinct and in many ways superior to only knowing what to think, should not be lost on any rational person.

### THE CONTINUAL BENEFIT OF *KALĀM* & THE HARM IN IGNORING IT

Yet another sad consequence of abandoning the study of *ʿAqīdah* has been well-intentioned and ostensibly Sunnī public intellectuals, often very accomplished in Western Academia, but lacking even a basic command of classical Arabic, hastily dismiss *Kalām* as not being relevant to the “new” challenges posed to Islām and its intellectual framework. The strange thing is that many who express sentiments like this lack competence classical Arabic, yet believe their readings in English qualify them to make such serious judgments. Can you imagine what a mockery would be made of someone who only could speak and read Urdu and whatever was translated into it began to comment with an air of authority on theoretical physics or cutting edge medical research? Even more frustratingly, those

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22 Like physicists and chemists

23 Like Sociologists, Anthropologists, and the like.

intellectuals who can access classical Arabic rarely have actually taken the time to read the old books of *Kalām* in any serious way, much less with a teacher.<sup>24</sup>

24 A noteworthy exception to the idea that all or most antagonists to the *Kalām* tradition are untrained in the classical Arabic sources are those who currently hold a position attributed to many of the *salaf*, namely that *kalām* is unsubstantiated speculation regarding revelation and the very nature of Allāh, thus a sin worse than theft and fornication, which is most widely ascribed to the Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, may Allāh sanctify his heart, and those who follow his school. Without casting any aggression toward this opinion which holds some merit, especially for the context in which it was first held, it goes without saying that such an approach will struggle to offer any help to a university student dealing with the ideological hailstorm on campus. Even then, a negation of *kalām* as scholastic theology is far from a negation of the importance of *ʿAqīdah*. The majority of Muslim scholarship, at any rate, didn’t see *kalām* in the post-*salaf* context as an abomination; I feel that radiant lamp of truth preserved in the *kalām* tradition would be unfairly thrown into the garbage heap of history by many at a time of darkness when the *ummah* acutely needs its light.



Such an attitude has gained currency among many generous and reverent defenders of Islām who opine that *kalām* held a useful function in the past, but gives the contemporary Muslim little preparation for the onslaught liberal modernity is directing at the world. Similarly, other less well-intentioned academic and post-colonial intellectual elites, hold *en vogue* a vision of *Kalām* as a kind of fossilized carcass, declaring it an irrelevant and even decadent feature of a past, best left behind. What's fascinating here is that, both share a similar belief in history's linear progress; somehow the future, solely by virtue of it being the future,

death-raining technology does not necessitate intellectual superiority. Nor is the ability to kill and enslave people isn't an attribute of the *ḥaqq*.<sup>25</sup>

Yet still many Muslims wonder: what could discussions regarding the classical ideas about materialism or polemical refutations of the *Muʿtazilah* and *Bāṭiniyyah* have to do with answering Richard Dawkins, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Liberalism, and the like?

The answer is more than you think.

The arguments of scientists against religion are not as seemingly unassailable as they may appear. As empirical philosophers,

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25 Truth

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necessarily brings with it more sophisticated challenges than the past did, a hallmark of haughty modernist thinking.

This idea seems to be validated in the colonized mind when it soaks in the stark reality of disenfranchisement and defeatism that surrounds it. I state here unequivocally that the ability to marshal armies and

they themselves have jettisoned a large part of rationality from their own discourse, vainly declaring that if it can't be seen, heard, tasted, touched, smelled or measured, it doesn't exist. Such an unexamined statement, when taken to its logical conclusion, would have us revert to Roman numerals and render the Big Bang a rational conundrum.

The arguments for *kufr*, all of which, whether in the form of polytheism or atheism, all depend on affirming the divinity of the material things of this universe, in similar, but subtly different ways.

It is a maxim of the scholars based on a number of statements of revelation that all the different types of *kufr*, ultimately comprise of one *millah*.<sup>26</sup> For example some said that God resides in everything. Others said that God was born in the flesh. Some said that there is no God. All, however, in order to explain the incoherence of everything spontaneously existing from nothing, stated that the material universe must have always had attributes Muslims ascribed to the Divine. Many resort to claiming it existed in some cyclically reiterating form,<sup>27</sup> and thus will continue to do so, possessing pre-primordially and eternity, both being essential attributes of what we call God. It is against this backdrop that Islām, rather than assigning Divine attributes to the creation, affirms Allāh’s being thoroughly unlike His creation and transcendent above it.

It is from this basis that the *Kalām* tradition painstakingly refutes many possible contortions and adjustments that *kufr* can, has, and will make in order to free itself from the trap of its own initial incoherence. Through study of those refutations, a road-map to answers to modern obsessions like

26 الكفر ملة واحدة

27 Which, ironically, has yet to be empirically proven; who has an imaginary friend now?

“if God is so omnipotent, why are children born with deformities?”; “why can’t we refer to God as a she,”; or “If God exists, show him to me, and if you can’t, admit He doesn’t exist,” comes into clear view. Once the existence of Absolute Truth is established and necessarily affirmed, the moral and existential chaos of an absolutist relativist (yes, I’m aware of how silly it sounds) liberal modernity is resolutely challenged. Without that affirmation, answering simple questions like “Who am I?” becomes cumbersome.<sup>28</sup>

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*“...Islām, rather than assigning Divine attributes to the creation, affirms Allāh’s being thoroughly unlike His creation and transcendent above it.”*

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28 It is interesting that in attempting to explore this question, *cotigo ergo sum* is considered to be a treasure of *Farangī* philosophy: in our tradition, one doesn’t even begin the long journey of understanding reality, without paying the toll tax of *fanā*. Indeed, when reading the works of *kalām*, one quickly realizes that the more intellectually taxing exercise isn’t the refutation of *kufr*, rather that of refuting heterodox groups which operate under the umbrella of Islāmic identity, like the Mu‘tazilah, Khawārij, and the Rawāfiq, who dared not challenge God head on, but strayed by overlaying their own sophistry over revelation. Thus, the more skilled refutations are not those of *kufr*, but of the spurious interpolations of the *nafs*, which gave rise to heterodoxy in Islām, which is expressed in the refutation of such groups. Thus, one can restate a reality mentioned above through its opposite: the journey to *kufr* can only begin in earnest by the complete affirmation of *nafs*, Allāh forgive and protect us all, and give all of us a good end.

## EPILOGUE: *Ij̄TIHĀD*

I'd like to conclude, not by neatly wrapping the discussion up, but by throwing a number of doors open, namely the doors of *ij̄tihād*, which were never closed in the first place, at least for those whose purview it was and remains. *Ij̄tihād* is a very interesting idea, one of which many speak but few understand. Much like playing on a professional sports team is the preserve of the elite of that sport, *ij̄tihād* is an actual reality for those few who combine the God-given spiritual<sup>29</sup> and intellectual strengths needed to have a shot at it, with the years of hard work and practice. Also, much like professional sports, although there may be only a handful of legitimate practitioners of *ij̄tihād*, there are thousands, if not millions of pretenders behind them ready to dream about it, talk about it and offer their detailed commentaries about it—commentaries bearing various levels of insight and/or connections to any kind of reality. The current reductionist, atomistic approach that is in fashion amongst the intelligentsia is an antagonist to an *uṣūlī*, methodologically consistent approach to anything in the *Dīn*; the lack of study of *ʿAqīdah* shuts out the student from *uṣūl* at the ground floor as *ʿAqīdah* itself forms the foundation of *uṣūl*.

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29 Not all spiritual achievements are virtuous. Some are evil, and many others are morally neutral.





The preservation of *ijtihād* and its requisite branches of learning requires that there be a body of literature and group of people who can trace the final product of the various branches of Islāmic learning from source materials to the final prescriptions found in the canonical texts of the different sciences. A pseudo empirical-textual fixation not only subverts the superiority of the living tradition as described above, but also renders *ijtihād* practically meaningless. Supplanting the importance of *uṣūl*, which is the craft of *ijtihād*, games the system in the direction of literalism, or worse yet, a type of literalistically-inspired *māya*<sup>30</sup> in which each individual, who may be busy becoming

30 The Hindu concept of the illusory conception that each individual has of the world around him. To others it is an illusion, but to the individual in question, it is real; thus there is no such thing as a reality anchored at any absolute truth, rather an array of quasi-truths, which may be completely true, but only to the individual who holds them as such.

a doctor, shopping, on Facebook and Twitter, and giving their opinion, interprets text based on the meaning that most strongly occurs to them.

In such a nightmarish reality,<sup>31</sup> truth, authority, reason and orthodoxy are replaced with a type of democracy of stupidities. This has been described in the *ḥadīth* of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ: “Whoever speaks about the Qur’ān by his own opinion is wrong even if [he happens to be] right.”<sup>32</sup> The implication here is that the methodology by which the truth is sought is so horrid that it nullifies any possible benefit of randomly arriving at a correct conclusion. The similitude is one of a person who, instead of waiting to land at the airport and taking a cab home, jumps from the airplane as it flies over his house; timing his jump with a nearly impossible accuracy. Even if he is lucky and arrives at his destination, his arrival is not in any worthwhile manner.

Aside from the damage such an approach inflicts on the intellectual establishment of the *Dīn* due to its rabid irregularity, what is perhaps most tragic is how such intellectual vigilantism robs the top minds of the *ummah* of the chance to see the bigger picture when it comes to the sacred *sharī’ah*. Muslim scholars do not celebrate Abū Ḥanīfah and Mālik, amongst the *salaf* and Imām al-Ḥaramayn,

31 This seems to be the direction in which the enfranchised elites of both the Muslim world and the world in general are both headed, if they haven’t already taken up residence decades ago.

32 Tirmidhī: *بَابُ مَا جَاءَ فِي الدِّيْنِ يُفَسِّرُ الْقُرْآنَ بِرَأْيِهِ*

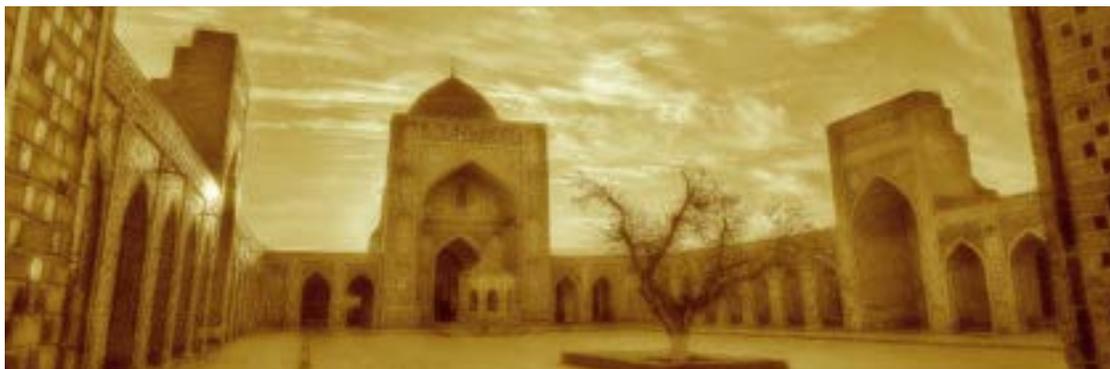
Ghazālī, Shāṭibī, Qarāfī, Shāh Waliyyullāh, and others from the latter generations for amassing pages filled with attestations to particular rulings. Rather, they are looked to as beacons of light for their ability to explain the *uṣūlī* theory upon which the well-known precedents of the *Sharī‘ah* were based. In many cases, they showed how that same *uṣūl* could be used to extrapolate rulings where no precedent existed.

Such a big picture understanding of the sacred *Sharī‘ah* can only come from an *uṣūlī* understanding, the appreciation of which can only come with a solid foundation in the

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEARNING & PROMOTING *SUNNĪ AQĪDAH*:

### REGULAR FOLKS

Take a course in a basic text of *‘Aqīdah* like that of Imām Ṭaḥāwī, Ibn Abī Zayd, Ibn ‘Āshir, or the like with an erudite and qualified scholar, like the *mashāyikh* at reputable institutions like [Ribāt](#), [Dār al-Qāsim](#) or [Masjid al-Hudā](#). If you don’t have access to in-person classes, listen to a recording of the explanation of the complete text of the *‘Aqīdah Ṭaḥāwiyyah* [here](#).



robust study of *‘Aqīdah*; without it you lose the Ghazālī and are left with the *Ghazālī for Kids* series.

Understanding how to think is indeed the crown jewel of *ijtihad* which is the difference between the ignoramus who will be punished even when arriving at the correct conclusion, versus the true *‘Ālim* who will be rewarded twice for his correct conclusions and once for those which fall short of the mark. Thus, abandoning the study of *‘Aqīdah* is worthy of far more concern than many perceive.

### COMMUNITY SERVANT-LEADERS

Contact organizations like [Imam Ghazali Institute](#) or those listed above, and coordinate bringing such a course to your community targeting community leadership, students of knowledge, academics, as well as the public at large.

Support, seek advice from, and give a platform to those scholars who truly understand, believe in, uphold, and promote the *Sunnī* tradition, not merely as

identity, but as a functional basis for viewing the world.

#### NOVICE STUDENTS OF KNOWLEDGE

Read, master, and memorize a simple *matn* like those mentioned above, in Arabic, and take time to read through their commentaries.

Familiarize yourself with the intellectual history of Sunnī *Aqīdah*, and be able to trace how it has developed from the age of *Risālah*, the *Salaf*, the founding of its three main classical traditions, namely the Ash‘arī, Māturīdī, and Atharī schools, and how they dealt with major intellectual challenges in the past, like the Mu‘tazilah and the Bāṭiniyyah.

Seek out a qualified teacher in one of those three traditions, who can competently teach

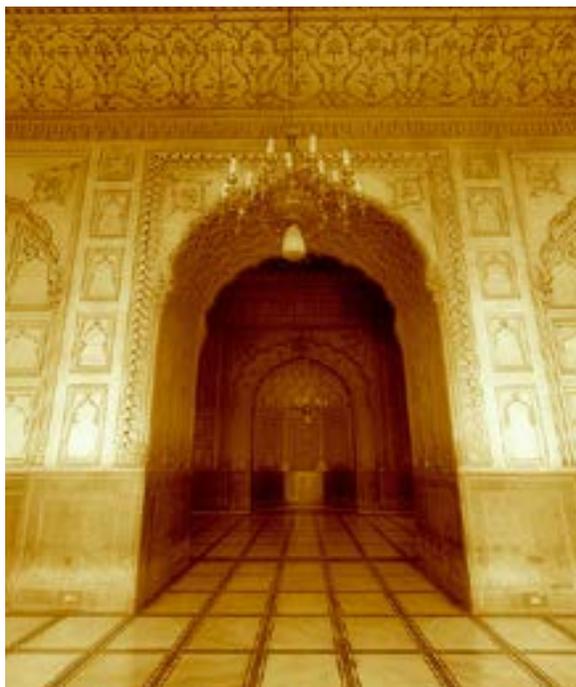
you beginning and intermediate *Kalām* works, and demonstrate to you the connection between the text and the school of *Kalām*; the Ḥanafī school of *fiqh* being deeply connected to the Māturīdī school of *Kalām*, the Shāfi‘ī school being deeply connected with the Ash‘arī, and the Ḥanbalī school with the Atharī.<sup>33</sup> As for the Mālikī school, it was initially associated with the Atharī school, but after the *fitnah* of Ibn Tumart’s false claim to being the *Mahdī*, built on robust dialectics, they *en masse* took up the Ash‘arī school in order to defend the integrity of Sunnī creed from further spurious assault.<sup>34</sup> Keep contact with said teacher and refer back to him or her whenever questions regarding the credal implications of any legal, social, political or other issue comes up.

#### ADVANCED STUDENTS OF KNOWLEDGE

Teach a class based on a basic text, like those mentioned in the recommendation section for regular folks at least twice a year; it will solidify your knowledge of its contents and allow you to see their implications in other matters you would have otherwise been heedless of, due to them being in your mind constantly. Additionally, it will be a good way of paying the *zakāt* due on they knowledge you have accumulated.

33 Being represented in the *Salaf* by the concept of *Tafwīd*, or vouchsafing the knowledge of that which is unclear to Allāh, rather than anthropomorphism.

34 المعيار العربي، المجلد الثاني



Read the intermediate and advanced books of your *Kalām* tradition. The advanced level texts will orient you with the opinions of the other schools as well. Do not suffice with that; rather read the texts of the other schools in order to get a fresh and accurate picture of their arguments.

In addition to your teachers, keep contact with a group of students who are at your level of study and reading and discuss matters of import in the intellectual, social,

political and cultural life of the Muslim and the world around. When appropriate, write about such topics for the benefit of other students of knowledge and even the general public.

Use *Aqīdah* as a way of grounding your view of the world around you, allowing you to extricate yourself from getting caught up in ancillary issues, which while important, take a secondary importance when compared to those residing in the space of creed.



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